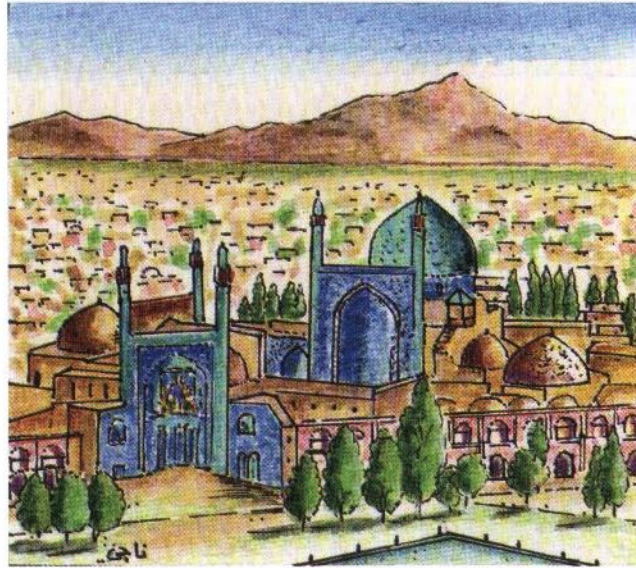


# IBN KHALDUN

The *Maghribî* Master of the *Muqaddimah*



"... , social organization is necessary to the human species. Without it,  
the existence of human beings would be incomplete." *Muqaddimah*

WRITTEN & ILLUSTRATED BY  
**LUQMAN NAGY**

## PREFACE

**H**istorians agree that the 'golden age' of Islamic civilization peaked during the period of the 'Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258). Its capital, Baghdad, was the wealthiest and most prosperous city outside of the borders of China. It had been the centre of an 'information explosion' in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when the caliph Ma'mun inaugurated the *Bayt al-Hikmah* ('House of Wisdom'), the renowned translation academy whose mission was to preserve the entire corpus of Greek scientific learning in Arabic translation. Arabs learned the secret of papermaking from the Chinese, and by the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Baghdad had a street with a hundred paper sellers: the *sûq al-warrâqîn* (سوق الورّاقين).

The discovery of inexpensive paper – replacing the more costly papyrus and animal skin parchment – improved literacy throughout *Dar al-Islam*. Muslims became avid readers of compilations of *ahadith* ('traditions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) and the historic, scientific and literary works being published in important centres of Islamic scholarship such as Bukhara, Damascus, Cairo, Qayrawan, Fez and Cordoba. Islamic culture was now synonymous with the high civilization of a 'book culture'. Even before the destruction of the 'Abbasid capital (and demise of the caliphate) by the invading Mongols in 1258, splinter dynasties had begun to break away and rule independently of Baghdad. Regional dynasties sprang up in Central Asia and all across North Africa and Muslim Spain.

By the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Ilkhan Mongols ruled Iran; the Mamluks controlled Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz; and local Berber dynasties ruled the lands in northwest Africa. The once unified Spanish Umayyad Caliphate was a distant memory. Al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) was slowly being 'reconquered' by





Christian armies. The 14<sup>th</sup> century was a tumultuous time in Islamic history. The vast expanse of *Dar al-Islam* was fractured and many regional governments held power for only three or four generations, or about a century.

In 1332, Ibn Khaldun was born in a quiet quarter of old Tunis. The gifted and very inquisitive boy became an even more ambitious adult who travelled across North Africa in pursuit of knowledge and lucrative government positions. He led a full and adventurous life in a very fluid and politically unstable world: He observed the loss of Muslim Spain to the Christians, the rise and fall of Berber governments, the expansion of the new Ottoman Turkish state and the contraction of the Byzantine one. Ibn Khaldun attempted to identify specific causes for all these historic events, eventually formulating a theory for the predictable rise and fall of civilizations. His unique philosophy of history was eloquently laid out in the *Muqaddimah*\* ('Introduction'), a book that, in the words of the British historian, Arnold J. Toynbee, is "undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever yet been created by any mind in any time or place."

This book is an introduction to the life and times of Ibn Khaldun, the *Maghribî* master of the *Muqaddimah*. *Insha'Allah*, it will enable readers to better understand and appreciate his innovative contributions to the study of history that made Europeans dub him both the 'Father of Sociology' and the 'Father of Economics'.

\* All excerpts from the *Muqaddimah* quoted in this book are from Franz Rosenthal's three-volume translation, *The Muqaddimah* (second edition 1967, Princeton University).

Luqman Nagy  
December 2010





# CHAPTER 1

**T**he Arabian Peninsula was the home to many ancient civilizations. Kingdoms, such as those of Saba, Qatab and Himyar, thrived centuries before Islam. Indeed, the Noble Qur'an mentions the Prophet Sulaimân عليه السلام and his correspondence with *Balqis*, the Queen of Saba (Sheba), who was invited to worship Allah, the One True Lord.

﴿وَصَدَّهَا مَا كَانَتْ تَعْبُدُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنَّهَا كَانَتْ مِنْ قَوْمٍ كَافِرِينَ﴾ النمل: ٤٣

"And that which she [*Balqis*] used to worship besides Allah has prevented her (from Islam), for she was of a disbelieving people." *An-Naml*: 43

These Arabian civilizations were located in southern Arabia, in present-day Yemen. In the remote eastern part of that country, there was a secluded valley: the Wadi Hadhramawt. All southern Arabia, including this valley, was an important supplier of incense, an extremely valuable commodity in ancient times. Incense, such as frankincense and myrrh, were exported north to Egypt, Byzantium and Rome.

During the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the message of Islam was conveyed beyond the borders of Arabia. Invitations to the new religion were sent to the Negus





In the remote eastern part of south Yemen lies the secluded valley of the Wadi Hadhramawt. Mud skyscrapers towering nine to ten storeys have been built there for centuries. Ibn Khaldun traces his descent to a family from this region.



## CHAPTER 7

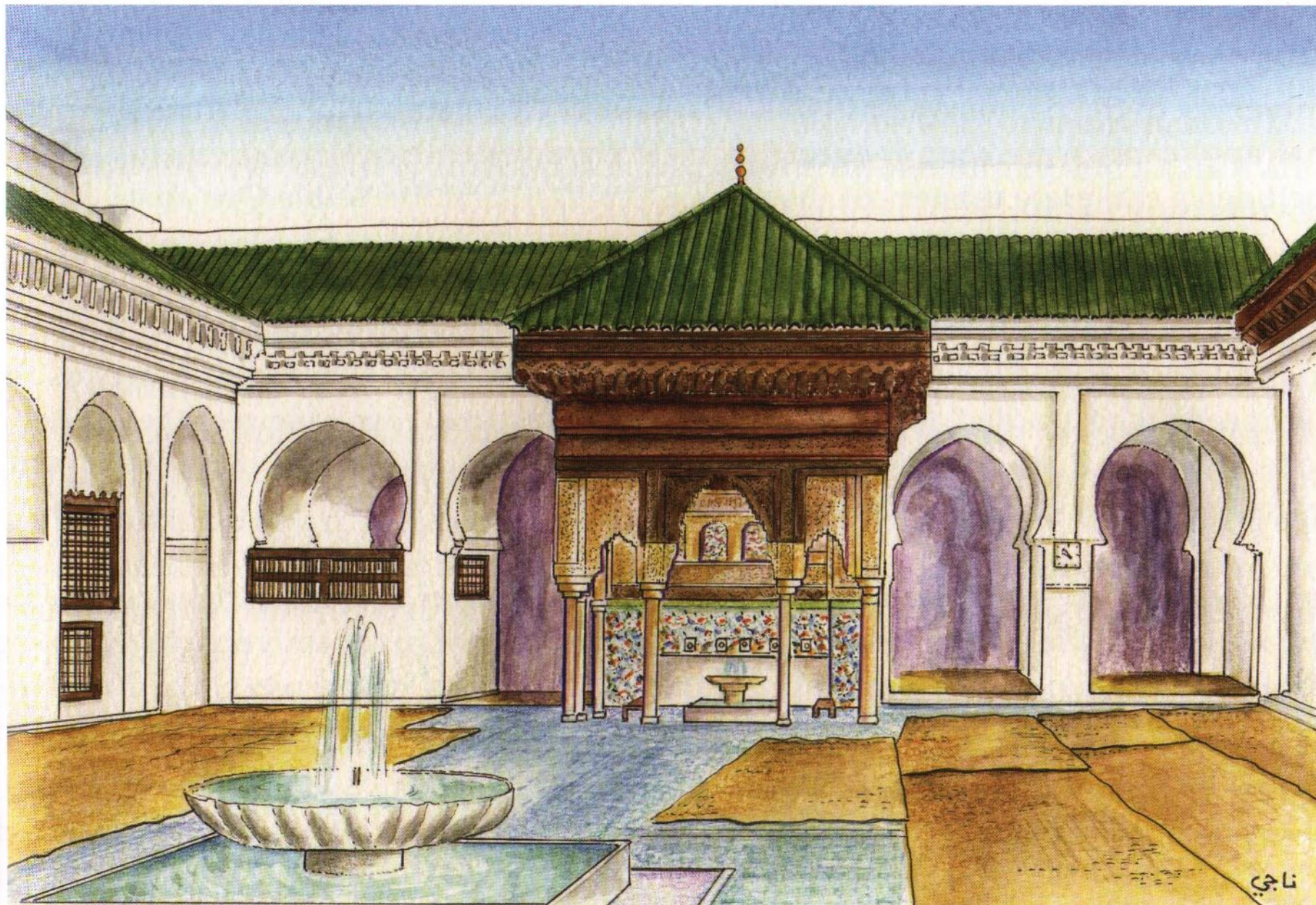
**I**bn Khaldun took full advantages of the educational opportunities available to him in Fez. Many of the most outstanding scholars of the day taught classes at the city's Qarawiyyin Mosque – the first true university in the world!

The university mosque was established shortly after the founding of Fez in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Fatimah al-Fihri, a wealthy, educated woman from the Tunisian city of Qayrawan, settled in Fez with her father. She eventually spent her entire inheritance on building a mosque for the community of Qayrawani immigrants in the city. She prayed that her mosque would one day play a major role in educating and reforming the lives of her people.

Over time, the Qarawiyyin Mosque developed into a university of great renown. It graduated scholars of *hadith*, *fiqh*, history, geography, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, medicine, grammar and the Arabic language. The mosque was located in the centre of the city, surrounded by a bustling *sûq*. During the day, the mosque was frequented by hundreds of craftsmen and shopkeepers, who were also offered special classes at the university.

The quality of instruction at the Qarawiyyin was the best available. The university





Many of the most outstanding scholars of the day were attracted to Fez and taught classes at the famous Qarawiyyin Mosque – the first true university in the world! During his stay in Fez, Ibn Khaldun studied the *Mālikī* rite of Islamic Law at the Qarawiyyin. He is also said to have taught there.



## CHAPTER 15

**I**bn Khaldun, approaching seventy years of age, returned to Cairo and continued to lecture, revise his great historical work and complete his autobiography. He was offered the post of Grand *Qâdî* several more times until his death in 1406. During the last twenty years of his life, he had lived at the opposite end of the Mediterranean – far removed from northwest Africa that had played such an important part in his earlier life. But he considered himself a ‘westerner’ all his life and continued to wear the *burnûs*, the traditional woolen cloak of North Africa, even on his trip to meet Timur.

Ibn Khaldun was not the first historian. The chronicling of historical events was a tradition even in pre-Islamic Arabia, where lengthy tribal genealogies, stories and poems were memorized. With the arrival of Islam and literacy, these important orally-transmitted histories were set down in writing. Similarly, the enormous number of *ahadith* (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) were being verified and preserved in writing. Muslim historians rigorously authenticated each of the hundreds of thousands of *ahadith* that had been collected. In meticulously tracing the lineage of each *hadith*, *muhaddiths* (scholars of *ahadith*) developed their own historical method.

One might say that Ibn Khaldun was fortunate to have lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> century as he



بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
يقول العبد البغير الرحمة ربه الغني بالله عبد الرحمن بن  
محمد ابن خلدون الحضرمي وفيه الله تعالى  
الحمد لله الذي له العزة والجبروت. ويده الملك والملكوت. وله  
الأسماء الحسن والنعموت. العالم بلا يعز عنه ما تنصره النجوم  
أو يخفيه السكوت. الفاء بلا يعجزه شيء في السموات والأرض ولا  
يعوت أنشاءنا من الأرض نسما. واستعمرنا فيما أحيانا وأما.



